Characters

(Five characters: three women, two men)

KEIKO

APHRODITE

SHIZUKO*

DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI*

DR˙ EVERETT*

[*Chorus of Bomb Victims]

Time and Place
Hiroshima, 1945; New York City, 1955; and metaphysical spaces.

Scene One	A metaphysical site.
Scenes Two-Four	Hiroshima. 1945.
Scenes Five-Fourteen	Post-nuclear Hiroshima. Early 1950s. And New York City.

Note
This play is meant to be performed without an intermission.

Scene 1

Scene One

(Lights and sound fade in to reveal a brilliant March morning. KEIKO, in Girls' Day regalia, enters with a basket of white chrysanthemums. She kneels, removes folding paper from her sleeve, and folds it into a bird that she causes to fly. As Japanese music fades in, KEIKO'S traditional dance mimics a bird in flight.

In the midst of her mirth, the sounds of a cruising B-29 fade in, along with other sounds of encroaching warfare. KEIKO prays inaudibly, at first with bent head and then beseechingly to the heavens. She takes a worn book from her sleeve and gazes at it with hope before holding it heavenward.

The lights cross-fade to celestial lights as mist fills the air, from which emerges a placid APHRODITE, naked and glittering-alabaster, including her long tresses that undulate in the breezes. She wears a glittering alabaster mask with pupil-less eyes, in the mode of classical Greek statues. She stands as in Sandro Botticelli's painting of "The Birth of Venus." The sounds of war acquiesce to tranquil classical background music.

Stunned by APHRODITE, KEIKO bows deeply. APHRODITE studies her with serene delight and bows her head briefly towards the maiden.

APHRODITE begins to dance fluidly, matching the music's style. Projected in the background up stage are the images of swans and doves. As the goddess dances, shimmering eucalyptus leaves, white rose petals, and myrtle--her sacred flora-cascade.

KEIKO kneels and observes with increasing worship. She picks up the flora that fall within her reach.

But the sounds of warfare return and crescendo, and APHRODITE'S dance shifts into a 1940s-era western modern style, as the cascade of flora ceases. KEIKO, as if flailed into the dance by an unseen force, joins her.

The warfare sounds grow frenzied, and become peppered with the sounds of distant fire-bombs and bomb-alert sirens. These sounds intensify and close in, as does the women's dance.

Fire crackles. Flames appear at the bottom of the projected images, which begin to melt away as if dissolving in the flames. As the dance ends, lights fade to black and music fades out.)

Scene 2

Scene Two

(An August morning. Perspiring from the humidity and heat, the nevertheless graceful KEIKO and plain and industrious SHIZUKO repair army uniforms. They wear old *yuukata,* but the bottoms are tied up, exposing *monpei* [work pants].)

SHIZUKO

What is the point of repairing these threadbare uniforms?

KEIKO

Just because something seems beyond hope doesn't mean you give up.

SHIZUKO

Can we please take a break? My hair needs to be braided again. It's all falling apart. I'm eating my tangles.

KEIKO

Come, I'll comb your hair.

(SHIZUKO kneels as KEIKO begins to comb her hair.)

SHIZUKO

Let's guess how many fire bombs have been dropped since the war began.

KEIKO

War isn't a game, little sister.

SHIZUKO

But how many do you think?

KEIKO

I think that if you work really hard today, I might play piano for you tonight.

SHIZUKO

You already promised so you have to.

KEIKO

Yes. Just like you promised to work hard.

SHIZUKO

You're thinking about Sato Nishimura's promise, aren't you?

KEIKO

You seem to worry about him more than I do.

SHIZUKO

Well, I know you wait for the day that he'll return from war. Don't worry. He'll come back for you. After all, he gave you two kilos of rice. That tells us he's a fool.

KEIKO

He gave that to us.

SHIZUKO

You don't give away a week's rice ration to another family unless that family's got something you want.

KEIKO

Mother has promised to discuss Sato with Father.

SHIZUKO

Imagine what it would be like to marry someone as handsome as Sato. To have beautiful children, to be the envy of every girl in the neighborhood. You're lucky to be old.

KEIKO

Old er. But I only have a couple of years before I'm too old. That's why this war has to end and Sato has to hurry home. Think of how embarrassing it would be to be twentyone and not married.

SHIZUKO

There will be no one left to marry me; so many boys are dying. The good ones who come home will want the best.

KEIKO

Of course. You must offer your husband the best of everything.

SHIZUKO

No, I mean they'll want the girls who stand out from the crowd. Girls like, well, like you. Sato would never be interested in a girl like me.

KEIKO

You're lovely and kind. Any boy would--

SHIZUKO

When I used to pass him on the road, I had to say hello in an overly loud voice just so he'd notice me. He was very polite. He always said hello with a brilliant smile, but then walked away forgetting me instantly.

KEIKO

Sometimes those who stand out from the crowd are the ones who are feared the most.

SHIZUKO

Is that so? Is that why they gawk at you and stutter stupidly? Just to cover up what they really want to say?

KEIKO

Drawing attention to yourself is never a good thing.

SHIZUKO

But you don't. It's them staring at you, even if you're only picking your nose. Anything you do is something to see.

KEIKO

Too much praise may just be a warning that you don't fit in; that you're too fat, too old, too tall, too--

SHIZUKO

Too beautiful. Like those goddesses in the stories Grandmother used to read to us. Greek, Chinese, American, African stories. She looked so different from most Japanese that all she cared about was difference.

KEIKO

There. A neat braid for a messy little sister. And thank the gods that Grandmother taught us all those things. We know there's a world beyond Japan. So few people ever understand that.

SHIZUKO

You're just like her. Too smart and too different. You're the only one who looks like her. That's why you love her stories so much.

(a pause, then:)

Keiko? Will anyone ever want to marry me?

(Lights cross-fade to…)

Scene 3

Scene Three

(That night. SHIZUKO sleeps on a futon. A kerosene lantern glows. Enter KEIKO with a candle. She is in clean *yuukata.* She prepares her bed.)

SHIZUKO

What's the matter?

KEIKO

Nothing. The candle smoke burned my eyes.

SHIZUKO

And that gives you the octopus-mouth face?

KEIKO

Go to sleep.

SHIZUKO

Did Father talk to you?

KEIKO

If you stay up late, demons will come to get you.

SHIZUKO

Will you read me one of your fairy tales?

KEIKO

They're not fairy tales.

SHIZUKO

Okay, okay. They're myths; same thing. Don't cry.

KEIKO

Once upon a time, there was an artist who loved his wife so dearly that when she descended into Hades--

SHIZUKO

This is the myth about trust, isn't it? The Greek one? Why always the Greek? Especially that Aphrodite. Grandmother said the world began in China and Africa.

KEIKO

Grandmother said Aphrodite is the essence of the most beautiful yet most tragic human emotion: love. Shizuko… I'm going away. Father. He's sending me away.

(the lack of response from SHIZUKO surprises her)

Didn't you hear what I said? In a few days, Father will take me to Kyoto… to enter the service of the geisha.

What did I do? What I did was to be born different. Like Grandmother and her infamous tall nose, almond eyes, and light hair.

SHIZUKO

You're lucky.

KEIKO

Lucky? To be sent away? Father hopes I'll learn to play the *koto* like an angel and one day send money home. Sato will come back and I won't even be here. Because of being different, my father made a deal with the geisha mistress to make an investment in me. She'll cover the costs of my lessons and costumes. I'll pay it back slowly. Does that sound like a dream to you? You say I'll be pampered, but it's just a prison where I trade my humanity for the sake of our family. That's my reward: to be an article of trade passed from the hands of one sweaty stranger to another.

SHIZUKO

But girls pray to be able to be a geisha. I'll be an old maid and you'll be a great artist.

KEIKO

I only want to be a great wife and mother. Now all that's gone. Who will comb your wild hair? Who will read you myths?

(a pause, then:)

When Sato comes home, tell him I said goodbye--and tell him I didn't want to go. He needs to know I waited for him.

(SHIZUKO nods with discomfort)

What's the matter?

SHIZUKO

I've only ever said hello to him. I don't know if I can tell him all that.

KEIKO

Don't be scared. He's a good listener.

SHIZUKO

Only if the one he's listening to is you.

(a quick pause)

So you leave in just three days.

KEIKO

On August 7. But how did you know? I didn't tell you that.

(SHIZUKO looks away)

Shizuko?

SHIZUKO

Leave me alone. Can't you see I'm tired?

KEIKO

Tired of what? What have you done?

SHIZUKO

None of us can have a normal life as long as you're around. Mother caters to you and gives you all her pretty combs. Father looks at you like an heirloom to sell for the right price. And me? I live in the shadows. Nobody sees me. I might as well be wearing a shroud.

KEIKO

Please tell me that you didn't…

SHIZUKO

I just suggested it. In the end, it's Father who decides everything for us, isn't that so?

KEIKO

I always thought I'd spend my whole life living in Hiroshima as Mrs˙ Sato Nishimura: having tea, shopping, cooking meals, brushing my little girl's hair, making my husband happy.

SHIZUKO

(mostly to herself)

…maybe now I can have a dream, too.

(lies down and tries to sleep)

KEIKO

I hope your dream comes true, little sister. I hope the war ends and you marry a good man who makes you feel the most beautiful and loved all the days of your life. Goodnight.

(The moment that KEIKO blows out her candle, the kerosene lamp goes out and a diaphanous light fades in. As KEIKO lies down on her futon, a shimmering form is barely perceptible on the periphery of the darkness. KEIKO senses a presence.

KEIKO

Hello? Mother? Mother, is that you?

(APHRODITE appears, encircling KEIKO.)

KEIKO

I remember you.

APHRODITE

Yes?

KEIKO

It's true, isn't it? War makes men go mad. Even fathers.

APHRODITE

There's one thing that drives men madder than war.

KEIKO

What is that?

APHRODITE

Beauty.

(watches KEIKO take this in and then:)

Starving boys give up their rations just to gaze upon the hope that lives in all things beautiful.

KEIKO

Perhaps I will go mad, too. Yesterday, I dreamed about marriage. Now, all I can think about is my own mortality.

APHRODITE

Remember when your mother took you to that museum in Kyoto and you left feeling inspired because of all the exquisite paintings you saw? Recall the Renoir, the glorious faces of the women in repose. Beauty has power.

KEIKO

But my father said I am like those paintings. He said fine art exists in museums so everybody can enjoy it and it doesn't get worn out from one owner's attention. Sometimes it seems as though people think of beauty as a crime, as if there's a price to pay if you are beautiful. Have you paid a lot in your lifetimes, Immortal One?

APHRODITE

You know who I am, yes? And what I am made of?

KEIKO

My grandmother gave you to me.

APHRODITE

Then there is something immortal in you as well. The journey to discover it and own it lies before you.

KEIKO

But if you are made of love and all the hope that love can bring, why did you not help me with my Father?

APHRODITE

If you persist in looking behind you, you shall be lost in the wilderness of the mortal mind. It is not my charge to interfere with your destiny.

KEIKO

But that's what gods do: they interfere with mortal lives. Interfere and keep me from Kyoto. Please.

APHRODITE

Listen well, Apostle. History is recorded by gods and men. I cannot change what they choose to paint; but I can paint my own portrait to defy their myths of me, their myths about love, of which they understand so little.

KEIKO

My father rules my destiny and he isn't even a god.

APHRODITE

Ah yes, like most men: running around wondering why they were not born gods and spending their lifetimes trying to compensate for it. Keiko-san, it is time for you to realize your own portrait.

KEIKO

And what portrait is that?

APHRODITE

Look around you. Most of the things you found beautiful are being destroyed by fire bombs. The flowers, the land, the temples. In the midst of war, let me be a beacon of hope. Let the burden of beauty be useful.

KEIKO

Beauty is a burden?

APHRODITE

You know that already. Physical beauty gathers attention and so often the wrong kind. Too little attention is paid to the true beauty of any soul, goddess or mortal.

KEIKO

Since my grandmother first read to me about you, you've inspired me. Because you survived being different. The world judged your beauty like a crime when it didn't serve their desires. Teach me to survive the curse of being different. You know about the arts of love and war. You defied a god-that husband forced upon you, Hephaestus--and he punished you, but you survived. You even loved a god of war.

APHRODITE

But there is a price to pay. Zeus places my name on the lips of strife, consigning me to follow what I once pursued-war-and use love to inspire peace. That is my destiny. Love must follow in the wake of war to deter its zeal and rebuild what it destroys. If not, then everything I am slowly begins to die.

KEIKO

But what happens if a girl--or goddess--doesn't fulfill her destiny?

APHRODITE

Her Zeus will take away her soul. Disintegration and disgrace. For love must exist as the gods define it.

KEIKO

As gods and men define it.

APHRODITE

Yes. Men who often come to us as good as blind wanting to conquer us with their seed, raise their flags in the *terra firma* of our souls and say, *This is my country and you cannot have her…* But then there is always another country wilder and more beautiful to be possessed. The appetite of such expansionism--they often call it love--is never satisfied. Keiko-san, seek your metamorphosis. Confront it with grace. For your life as you know it is soon to be a history made again by men.

(A distant siren and the sound of low-flying distant planes are heard, the sounds of war crescendoing. APHRODITE grows alarmed.)

KEIKO

(regarding the sounds)

What is it?

APHRODITE

The death of love. The death of my very essence. Find another place, Keiko-san.

KEIKO

What do you mean "find another place"? You mean I shouldn't go to Kyoto?

APHRODITE

The world is vast, dear sister. Be not afraid.

(The warfare sounds crescendo, then a thunderous boom. KEIKO bows low and formally to APHRODITE as she exits. Lights cross-fade to…)

Scene 4

Scene Four

(The next morning. Birds chirp, an occasional dragon fly buzzes. Exhausted and dirty from the effort, KEIKO and SHIZUKO move supplies in a wheelbarrow.)

SHIZUKO

If I have to clear any more fire lanes or move any more supplies, I'm going to cry. It wasn't so long ago that we laid on our beds and took naps in the afternoon.

KEIKO

Shizuko, do you remember what it was like before the war? What did bean jelly cake taste like? Did it taste like morning on Girls' Day when you first put on your festival kimono?

SHIZUKO

I don't even remember. It's as if I only read about it in a book a long time ago.

(The sound of B-29 planes cruising overhead fades in.)

SHIZUKO

There go those B-29s again. Sometimes they get so close that I can see the white devils' faces.

KEIKO

(to the bomber)

Go away, Mr˙ B!

(Stares with wonder at the circling B-29s)

I'm so used to their sound. Like the cicadas droning at night, annoying and yet so familiar that, when they're gone, you keep feeling as if you forgot something important on the train. Shizuko, let's try to remember the taste of bean jelly cake and good tea.

SHIZUKO

By tomorrow evening, you'll be in Kyoto having bean jelly cake and good tea.

(The B-29 sounds crescendo.)

KEIKO

Go away, B! Go away.

SHIZUKO

(recites to steady her nerves:)

GREEN PINE TREES, CRANES, AND TURTLES.
YOU MUST TELL A STORY OF YOUR HARD TIMES
AND LAUGH TWICE. Lyrics

(They recite it together for courage. The sun shines even more brilliantly, causing KEIKO to look up at the sky. SHIZUKO also looks up.)

KEIKO

(shouting)

Mr˙ B! Mr˙ B! I've had enough of you!

(A plane arrives and hovers. The sound of its circling crescendos followed by an atomic explosion.

The blue and cloudless sky gives way to a terrible, sudden flashing of brilliant orange light that turns white like lightning. Shock waves tumble; along with sounds of agony, buildings collapsing, and fire crackling. SHIZUKO is knocked unconscious by the force of the flash.

Lights shift to a macabre blue-black amid billowing smoke, and the sounds of thunder and tears. Images of shadows burnt onto the landscape appear and vanish frequently.

KEIKO musters incredible strength and drags her sister away from the flames. Rain begins and a rainbow arches across the darkness. Ghostly red, orange, and blue flames flicker. Large gray flakes fall like petals and a mushroom cloud appears in the background along with images of ghouls.

As KEIKO crawls through the ashes with her sister in tow, their bodies are shrouded in black and their faces cannot be seen. Their moaning is joined by a chorus of voice-over moans through which a hubbub of voices speak the following in matter-of-fact, resigned voices that overlap where the "/" appears:)

VOICE 1

My leg has/ been cut off.

VOICE 2

My back is/ broken.

VOICE 3

I need/ water, water.

VOICE 1

The air, it presses against me/ from all sides.

VOICE 2

The earth shakes violently/ under my feet.

VOICE 3

A hurricane wrenches around me… burns eat my flesh. I am blown several meters, as if I am a feather. Glass and metal shards tear…

VOICE 1

Gamma rays… neutron…/ radioactive soil…

VOICE 2

Mushroom cloud rising/ black rain falling.

VOICE 3

Black rain falling/ mud, dust, soot…

VOICE 1

Don't drink from the river;/ the water is poison!

VOICE 2

My skin is peeling like/ bark from a tree.

VOICE 3

Leave me here to die./ Leave me here to die.

VOICE 1

Excuse me for not being/ burdened like you.

VOICE 2

I cannot see. My/ eyes, my eyes…

VOICE 3

My mother is/ dead. Give me back my mother.

VOICE 1

My baby's head… floating/ down the river.

VOICE 2

My breasts severed./ Give me back my breasts.

VOICE 3

But why have I/ survived?

VOICE 1

Give me back my baby.

VOICE 2

My father.

VOICE 3

My mother.

VOICE 1

The flies. The flies…/ eating me alive.

VOICE 2

The flies are eating/ me alive.

VOICE 3

The flies are/ eating me alive.

VOICE 1

Eating me/ alive.

VOICE 2

Eating me/ alive.

VOICE 3

Eating me/ alive.

VOICE 1

Why have I/ survived?

VOICE 2

Why have I/ survived?

VOICE 3

Why have I/ survived?

VOICES 1, 2, & 3

(a whisper)

Why have I survived?

(This cacophonous chorus shifts into an EERIE SILENCE as KEIKO emerges naked with flower prints burned onto her flesh, webbed hands, monstrously disfigured face, webbed feet, neck and head joined.)

KEIKO

…am I unconscious… for how long… minutes?… hours?… days?… the sun… dead; chilly darkness…

thirst… Shizuko? Hiroshima… ashes… desert… my legs: needles… naked… blood on fire… flesh seeping… shreds… Mama, help me. Ghosts at the river… blistering, drinking, falling into the current. Nothing beautiful… I crawl to the river… my turn to drink, the water steaming salvation… I cup my hand to my mouth… a stranger knocks it away. I am cold, empty, angry…

(A STRANGER emerges in even worse shape, her head stuck in its upward raised position, the face melted, her skin fiery red. The girls, not facing each other, not seeing each other, stand in murky spotlights on opposite sides of the stage. They shiver as if freezing.)

STRANGER

Keiko. The river holds the drink of death.

KEIKO

Who are you?

STRANGER/SHIZUKO

Shizuko.

(They stare at each others' visages in shocked silence. Then KEIKO turns her back on her sister. The voice of an American male is heard. Concurrently, APHRODITE, stained and ragged, appears in a celestial light up stage and mouths the following speech:)

AMERICAN MAN'S VOICE

My god, my god, what have we done? Father in heaven, have mercy on our souls.

(This speech reverberates, fading into the voice of a Japanese male:)

JAPANESE MAN'S VOICE

(with slight Japanese accent, imperial)

After pondering deeply the state of the world and the state of our Chrysanthemum Empire this day, we, the imperial government, have elected to surrender. General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, as Emperor of Japan, I hereby surrender my country to you. We sacrifice ourselves to your grace and forgiveness in the name of world peace.

(APHRODITE looks around her at the remnants of war. Lights fade out on SHIZUKO and she exits in the darkness. APHRODITE goes to KEIKO, sits at her side, and holds her in her arms:)

KEIKO

We've suffered some losses?

(APHRODITE nods)

Why have I survived?

APHRODITE

Rise, my child. Rise from these mortal ashes and live.

KEIKO

If you are my patron goddess, please help me die.

APHRODITE

I cannot. We must honor love. If you die, part of me dies.

KEIKO

Then we are both ghosts. For love is dead.

(KEIKO weeps uncontrollably. The goddess places a hand on her back to soothe her, but KEIKO pulls away sharply. The goddess is weakened, enervated. Black-out.)

Lyrics to old Japanese folk song.

Scene 5

Scene Five

(A spotlight fades up on DR˙ EVERETT in the church office. DR˙ EVERETT sits Japanese-style uncomfortably. Trying unsuccessfully to feel at ease, he shifts frequently. He checks his watch. Bespectacled, DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI limps in. DR˙ EVERETT registers concern as DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI bows to him and then attempts to sit.)

EVERETT

Here, let me help. Dr˙ Matsubayashi, is it?

MATSUBAYASHI

(nods gratefully and bows his head repeatedly)

Yes. Thank you, Dr˙ Everett. I am honored.

(DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI adjusts himself so that he sits with one leg tucked under his buttocks and his bad leg sticking out awkwardly. DR˙ EVERETT looks on enviously.)

MATSUBAYASHI

(notices the attention and smiles)

I can see you envy my absurd sitting position.

EVERETT

No, not at all, Dr˙ Matsubayashi.

MATSUBAYASHI

My leg has sicknesses related to the bombing, so I have to sit like idiot. You need no excuse.

EVERETT

I beg your pardon? There's nothing idiotic about American-style sitting. In fact, it's healthier for the circulation.

MATSUBAYASHI

I am sorry. English is challenging, isn't it so? I meant that you do not need to follow Japanese custom because you are American gentleman. Sit cross-legged. You can even hang upside down from ceiling if you like.

(DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI is overly amused with himself. DR˙ EVERETT sits cross-legged.)

EVERETT

So you were in Hiroshima when the bomb fell?

MATSUBAYASHI

Yes sir.

EVERETT

But you have no visible burn scars.

MATSUBAYASHI

My office collapsed like Godzilla stepped on it, but I was only trapped in wood. No burns. My leg drained pus for years. It's atrophied from all the surgeries and shorter than the other. I was lucky.

EVERETT

So other than that you have no symptoms? You're a survivor of the first order?

MATSUBAYASHI

Are you asking as curious civilian or as doctor?

EVERETT

As a doctor.

MATSUBAYASHI

(amused)

Well, for last ten years, I've had influenza ninety percent of time. I am more tired than a pregnant housewife. I am anemic. Blood comes in my urine and stools so often that I am no longer startled to see it. My hair is falling out. Sores heal slowly. I am getting older faster due to accelerated aging. Kidney stones, intestinal disorders, occasional disorientation. Other than that, everything is coming up tulips.

EVERETT

That's, uh, roses.

MATSUBAYASHI

Is it roses?

EVERETT

Yes. The saying is, "Everything's coming up roses."

MATSUBAYASHI

(laughs heartily)

See? I can learn to speak English, but still never fully get it. Roses. Okay.

(a pause, more serious)

So, Dr˙ Everett, why do you as an American want to help these Japanese girls, really?

EVERETT

Well, in the west, we have an oath that doctors feel is their operative code. We swear to uphold the good of our patients, and to preserve the purity of our lives and the art of medicine. So I guess I'm here for the art of medicine.

MATSUBAYASHI

In Japan, doctors do not have an oath, but a saying. We say simply: "medicine is the art of compassion."

EVERETT

But then aren't we saying the same thing?

MATSUBAYASHI

I hope so, Doctor. We must be. After all, you're here. Mr˙ Heinemann said it wasn't easy to convince you to be part of this humanitarian project. What changed your mind?

(The stained and ragged APHRODITE enters, and kneels in the periphery of the light.)

EVERETT

The idea that, in Japan, beauty is adored, even considered divine; and that deformity is nearly demonic, something to avoid and shun. Nobody should have to live their lives being thought of in that way.

MATSUBAYASHI

We have selected a group of women who we think can be helped. There are, of course, countless bomb victims. You will have to choose who will be your patients. The project has enough funding to care for only twenty-five.

EVERETT

Are you aware that I was a field surgeon in the war? In the Pacific theater, in Guam?

MATSUBAYASHI

Yes. But, after all, it has been a decade. We must find a way to co-exist with integrity.

EVERETT

(a pause, then:)

Tell me more about the bomb victims before I have to choose.

MATSUBAYASHI

They were school girls helping to clear the center of the city, which put them at or near ground zero when the bomb was dropped. Nearly 6,000 degrees Centigrade. People stare at them in horror or gawk with icy pity. They hang around this church, afraid to burden the world with their scars.

(a pause, then:)

Thank you for offering services for free and for coming here to help me with kind of choices doctor should never have to make.

EVERETT

I had no interest in ever visiting this country because I saw firsthand what you did to our men. But I also know that forgiveness has to begin sometime. And medicine has to go across borders, beyond politics. I know you and your fellow doctors attempted surgery on these girls, and that Japanese cosmetic surgery is several steps behind American technique.

MATSUBAYASHI

All that these girls hope for is to be able to recover function and reasonable form.

EVERETT

Good because that's all I can do. So we have nothing to lose.

MATSUBAYASHI

That is easy for us to say.

EVERETT

After fighting in Guam and finishing my tour of duty in Tokyo, I was through with Asia. I left thinking I'd

never be back here.

MATSUBAYASHI

That's what I say every time I have a fight with my wife. I go out for a cold beer and think I'll get on a train, never look back. But I always return. Because I have to. Because I am human being and it is only real choice I can make in order to remain so.

(Lights cross-fade…)

Scene 6

Scene Six

(An interrogative, unworldly light shines center stage on KEIKO in her shroud. DR˙ EVERETT and DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI enter and approach the peripheries of the light. DR˙ EVERETT is mystified by KEIKO'S shroud. As the scene progresses, the light widens and diffuses, but its aura does not dissipate.)

EVERETT

Just how hurt is she?

KEIKO

(in Japanese)

Motto kuru shinde iru hitotachi mo imasu. Watashi wa un-ga yokatta no desu.

EVERETT

What did she say?

MATSUBAYASHI

She said others have bigger burdens to carry. She was spared.

KEIKO

(halting but good English with a slight accent:)

I study two years of English before war.

(in Japanese)

Watashi wa senso mae, Eigo wo sukoshi benkyo shimashita. Amerika-no eiga mo mimashita. Susan Heiwado-san to Gregori Peku-san ga daisuki deshita.

MATSUBAYASHI

She watched American movies before war. She liked Susan Hayward and Gregory Peck. Just like me.

EVERETT

(smiles at KEIKO)

"The Snows of Kilimanjaro." "My Foolish Heart."

KEIKO

Hai, hai. Ii eiga desu, ne.

MATSUBAYASHI

She likes your choices of films.

KEIKO

Demo "Deibido ando Basushiba" ga totemo ii.

MATSUBAYASHI

She said--

EVERETT

I understood her. "David and Bathsheba," right? That's what you said? It's the best, isn't it, because it has both Miss Hayward and Mr˙ Peck.

KEIKO

So desu ne.

EVERETT

Miss Kimura.

(gently, but official)

Could you-if you don't mind-remove your shroud. Could you let me see the extent of the damage, if you don't mind?

(KEIKO looks at DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI, who clearly disapproves of the request at this time.)

KEIKO

Sensei, watashi-no kao wa mite kimochi-no yoimono-dewa arimasen.

MATSUBAYASHI

She said her face is unpleasant. She wishes to spare you.

EVERETT

I'm a doctor, Miss Kimura. Remove the shroud, please. How can I know if I can help you if I don't know what the problems are?

(KEIKO says something to DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI that cannot be heard. DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI nods and then bows his head to her.)

MATSUBAYASHI

Miss Kimura has asked me to tell you about her condition. I have examined her for radiation-related illness.

EVERETT

Did you conduct the earlier cosmetic surgeries?

MATSUBAYASHI

(hesitates and then with a bit of shame)

Yes. I was part of the team.

(bows to KEIKO in apology, and then to DR˙ EVERETT)

Our mission was… unsatisfactory.

(Lights tighten to a harsh spotlight on KEIKO as the men speak in darkness. Ribbons of black and fire-colored light swirl around KEIKO as DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI talks; she is unaware of them. As DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI indicates parts of her body, her mittenencased hands extend to indicate the area, but never touch it, only hover above it.)

MATSUBAYASHI

I will begin by telling you something that Miss Kimura would rather I not say, but I think it's important because it makes her situation even more tragic. Before this happened, Miss Kimura was exquisite creature. Her beauty made people love her, but it also made people envy her, even alienate her at times. Perhaps even gods have punished her for being beautiful.

EVERETT

Excuse me? I don't understand. Why is beauty considered punishable?

MATSUBAYASHI

Maybe it was those who envied her that gods were punishing, those of us who demand so much of beauty. Shall I proceed? Her head is adhered to shoulder caused by severe burning of neck and face. Eyes were spared. Her mouth was round mound of pus, but she can move her jaws now even though her lips are non-existent. Two holes on flat surface represent her nose. Her hands and feet are webbed, the digits fused nearly from top to bottom in both cases.

(KEIKO'S arms slowly descend to her sides.)

MATSUBAYASHI

Her hair was burned off. The scalp is mutilated, bald surface. Oh yes, one more thing. The bomb's energy was reflected off white clothing and absorbed by dark clothing. Miss Kimura was wearing kimono with dark flowers on it that day.

(Ribbons of light fade and give way to the print of a flowered kimono which appears in shadows in the spotlight or in the background upstage.)

MATSUBAYASHI

The print of the kimono's flowers was burned into her flesh. Perhaps that can't be fixed.

(The spotlight fades as such a print lights the stage darkness, imbedded with plum blossoms. This begins a slow fade…)

EVERETT

Thank you for that meticulous report.

MATSUBAYASHI

You are most welcome, Doctor.

KEIKO

Doomo arigato gozaimashita.

(DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI bows to DR˙ EVERETT with deep respect. KEIKO kowtows to the group, which embarrasses DR˙ EVERETT. Lights black out with quick cross-fade to…)

Scene 7

Scene Seven

(Candlelight. SHIZUKO kneels in prayer.)

SHIZUKO

(recites)

"Blessed are those who are poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called the children of God." The

(KEIKO enters with a book and observes the prayer's end. She tries to put the book in her kimono sleeve, but it falls from her mitten-covered hands. SHIZUKO retrieves it. Together, they place it in the sleeve.)

KEIKO

After all these years, even the simple things can still be challenging.

SHIZUKO

What did you read to the children this evening?

KEIKO

The story of the Swamp Maiden.

SHIZUKO

You like the stories with a beautiful girl who is helped by a man.

KEIKO

He doesn't help her because she's beautiful. He helps her because he is good.

SHIZUKO

Nobody's that good without reason.

KEIKO

There's no reason for evil or for goodness. The maiden is dead, a spirit who everybody fears and avoids. The orphans here understand what that feels like. The story gives them hope that someone can care for them despite their scars and radiation sickness.

(SHIZUKO stares into a mirror fragment.)

KEIKO

Must you do that?

SHIZUKO

I'm not afraid to do it.

KEIKO

Looking in that mirror that's as broken as we are won't change anything.

SHIZUKO

God will save me.

KEIKO

"God"? How can you sit there and say that? In fact, how can you do what you've done and still sleep at night?

SHIZUKO

For the last ten years, we've been living in this church basement by the grace of God. If it were up to all the

good Japanese Buddhists, we would have been left on the street to rot. It only makes sense that I show my gratitude through the Christian baptism.

KEIKO

So you are reborn. Yet you seem the same to me.

SHIZUKO

The Japanese Christians are the only ones who haven't treated us like lepers. If it wasn't for the reverend, the American publisher would never have seen us and sent this doctor to help us.

KEIKO

Once, I actually felt like a leper. Now, I just feel invisible. I don't have to worry about people gawking at me or shunning me for fear of brushing up against me. I stay here at the church and tend to the orphans. They are just like us so they do not grow nauseous at the sight of us. Stop looking in that mirror.

SHIZUKO

What can I see through this shroud anyway?

KEIKO

You seem to see hope that isn't really there.

SHIZUKO

You'll never get over him, will you?

KEIKO

Isn't Dr˙ Matsubayashi late with his report of the American decision?

SHIZUKO

He said it would be quite late because there are so many girls to interview.

KEIKO

And they will choose only twenty-five. Mere men will determine the fate of hundreds of women. As if they were gods.

SHIZUKO

You know, you have to talk about him sometime.

KEIKO

Whatever you've heard about Sato Nishimura is no concern of mine.

SHIZUKO

You have to let go.

KEIKO

You have to let go.

SHIZUKO

(ignoring her, overlapping)

Especially now that the American doctor has come and you have a genuine chance for a new life.

KEIKO

That's what you said when Dr˙ Matsubayashi operated on us and look what good it did us. Just let me live in peace, the only peace I've been able to find over the last ten years.

SHIZUKO

Even if there had been no bomb, you would have been in Kyoto. And Sato wouldn't have been the same man anyway. The war would have changed him.

KEIKO

You liked him. You wanted him for yourself. You probably begged Father to send me away.

SHIZUKO

Sato didn't want to come back here because he lost a leg. I heard he moved to Wakayama and got married.

KEIKO

A Wakayama girl without radiation sickness, without burns on her face and body. He can have children with her, too; healthy children.

SHIZUKO

You don't have to die with his memory.

KEIKO

I'm very much alive. But I hope to die young. I hope to be useful to these orphans for a time, and then die quickly and peacefully.

SHIZUKO

But you can be more useful to the children if you try the American surgery. Don't you see? You may even be able to remove your shroud. Your hands could become more flexible. Maybe you'll be able to comb your hair again and I will learn to comb yours.

KEIKO

It's unlikely that our hair will ever grow back.

SHIZUKO

Sister, neither of us can really take care of each other or anybody else unless we first take care of ourselves.

(a pause)

There was a time when you were full of hope about changing the world.

KEIKO

Look around you, Shizuko. Rebuilding is slow. Trees and flowers grow back just as slowly.

SHIZUKO

But not the oleander. Remember? It began to grow back after only a few months. We have to be like the oleander.

KEIKO

I was lied to about the power of beauty to restore what's been lost.

SHIZUKO

Who lied to you? I didn't lie to you. Only the power of faith can restore what war takes away.

KEIKO

War can kill anything. And the first thing to die is hope. Why didn't you let me drink the poisoned river water that day so long ago? I would be dead, not just half-dead.

SHIZUKO

I was tempted to drink from the river myself. But, when I saw my sister there and realized I could lose you… We suffered the bomb and survived the war to be instruments of peace. Think of what a great honor the gods have bestowed upon us.

KEIKO

You only have one god now.

SHIZUKO

Don't you want to be able to sit next to someone on a train and not have them jump up to sit somewhere else? I know you do. Especially you. Because you were the one who everybody wanted to sit by before. You were the one they looked at. What are you afraid of?

(no response)

Sato Nishimura did love you. Once. You're lucky to have experienced that. I never will.

KEIKO

Maybe he did love me. When I was beautiful in the only way that is important to most men. Now, he's probably as good as blind. He probably can't really see who I am anymore, if he ever could.

(a pause, then:)

What would it be like to have an operation and look neither monstrous or beautiful, to blend into the crowd and never be noticed again? Can you imagine? I would just be a current in a river. Nothing more.

(a pause)

And nothing less.

SHIZUKO

Come to New York with me, Keiko. Please. Let's go see the Statue of Liberty and walk in Central Park. I'll be away for a whole year. Do you want to be apart for that long? Let's go, Sister. I won't let anybody hurt you.

Let's try another place.

KEIKO

Another place?

SHIZUKO

Yes.

KEIKO

Another place…

(Lights slowly fade.)

The Beatitudes, Matthew 5: 3-10.

Scene 8

Scene Eight

(The image of twenty-four women in kimonos and dark shrouds around their faces is projected up stage as KEIKO appears in new kimono and her shroud in a center stage spotlight. Sounds of New York City traffic, circa 1956, and sidewalk hubbub fade in. She appears astonished and repeatedly startled.)

KEIKO

I take a train across America. I am in the land of my conqueror. The countryside is beautiful in so many different ways--and so big, so endlessly big. The one thing that strikes me is that there are no signs of fire bombs or warfare of any kind. Soldiers never marched here. Battles were never waged. No cities burnt to the ground, no radioactive earth. I think of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and weep. I order tea at the snack bar and the older gentleman doesn't want to serve me. He is worse than the Japanese who do not want to sit by me on the train. To him, I am less than debris. A young man comes to help me and gives me black tea laced with sugar and cream. I smile and thank him, and wonder what else might be in this thick and cloying brew. *So this is America the beautiful,* I whisper to my sister. When we arrive in New York City, I am stunned by how modern it is. The men in their hats and ladies in gloves, the gilded hotels, the vastness and splendor of Central Park, the grandeur of the Statue of Liberty as she holds out her arms to welcome the world's weary, her embrace facing Europe, her backside facing the Orient. As I gaze at her, a boy throws a rock at me and pulls his eyes taut and upward, screaming, *Jap*! A woman who looks Japanese startles me when she speaks in perfect, unaccented English: *Are you all right? You'd better stay with your group,* she warns. My kimono irritates her and my shroud makes her uncomfortable. I nod and watch her walk away. A Japanese American. I am more interested in the phenomenon of her than in any tourist attraction. So this is America the beautiful.

(Lights cross-fade to…)

Scene 9

Scene Nine

(Early morning lights bathing a center stage statue of APHRODITE on a pedestal. She is a tarnished angels, worn and fading. A hospital garden. Birds are heard chirping in the distant background. A preoccupied KEIKO, still shrouded, enters. Then she sees the statue.)

KEIKO

It's you. After all this time. We've both come a long way to find each other here in a hospital garden. How fitting it is that I find you here cast in stone, as hard as our broken faith. Now I know how all your men must have felt.

(DR˙ EVERETT enters and is surprised to find KEIKO there. He startles her.)

EVERETT

Miss Kimura, are you all right?

KEIKO

Hai, sensei.

EVERETT

I'm sure New York is a bit overwhelming, but coming here was a big step for all of us. Thank you for being so brave. I'm sorry that people stare so much. The shroud draws attention.

(KEIKO bows)

After we finish, hopefully people won't stare anymore. Small victories, yes?

KEIKO

Victories. *Hai.*

EVERETT

I'm told your English has advanced greatly with the tutoring. I hear your ability is unusual.

(she bows, but her attention is on the statue)

Ah, Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The unabashed seductress. She's looking a little shabby, neglected no doubt, as she deserves.

KEIKO

(startled by this description)

Why do you disrespect her in such a way?

EVERETT

Well, what about the Trojan War? She started it by bribing Paris with Helen so she could win some Greek beauty contest, right?

KEIKO

I not so sure if start of war can be blamed on just one person.

EVERETT

But from a Christian point of view, Aphrodite was a sinner of the first order. Isn't that what we're supposed to rise above?

KEIKO

But she live before Christ.

EVERETT

You're too smart for me, Miss Kimura.

KEIKO

And she live now. Goddesses are immortal, *ne.*

EVERETT

You know a lot about her, I see. But why not a Japanese goddess? Why Aphrodite?

KEIKO

Why not? They are all one and the same. We just call them different names. Americans worship a man from Bethlehem, *ne.*

EVERETT

Touché. Well, your Aphrodite is just a statue in a hospital garden now. Someone else must have liked her, too,

and erected this statue in her honor.

KEIKO

But there can only be one reason they put her here in hospital garden: her power of renewal. She is meant to inspire hope, *ne.* Through all wars, failed loves, Aphrodite survive.

EVERETT

Such faith is admirable.

(KEIKO looks away)

Do you still have faith in her? … do you have faith in me?

(KEIKO remains silent)

Tell me something, Miss Kimura. Have you ever gone outside without your shroud?

KEIKO

Three weeks after bombing, my sister and I hide in school ruins in dark, our skin swathed in vegetable oil, our faces like demons. Dr˙ Matsubayashi help us make shroud.

EVERETT

Do you go without it when you're alone with your sister?

(KEIKO looks at him, but she is silent)

Do you wear it when you're by yourself? You won't even discard it then?

KEIKO

I accept myself, but I don't have to look at myself. Neither does anybody else.

EVERETT

Do you really accept yourself?

KEIKO

How would you feel if there was something horrifying about yourself that you do not want anybody to know and then you had to wear that thing day after day for all world to see? How would you feel? Like your Hester Prynne and her scarlet letter, *ne.*

EVERETT

Will you come with me to my office for our first meeting? The other young ladies should be arriving soon.

KEIKO

I will stay here a little while. In this garden. *Ii desu ka.*

(He exits. Penetrating ocean sounds fade in as the statue slowly comes to life, startling KEIKO. APHRODITE steps off the pedestal and caresses KEIKO'S shrouded face. KEIKO pulls away.)

KEIKO

I did not ask for you.

APHRODITE

But you have crossed an ocean to come where surely you knew I had to be.

KEIKO

Once I called you to help me and you left me in harm's way.

APHRODITE

(opens her arms and invites an embrace; KEIKO refuses)

That was not I. That was destiny.

KEIKO

Why did I ever think you could help me with Sato Nishimura when you failed at love so miserably?

APHRODITE

Love? I was just another manifestation of Hephaestus' passion for things golden, his ultimate trophy. He

bribed my father with gold, and I was sent to live in his lair cluttered with metal chaff and forced to suffer his perverse means of exciting himself--not passions, but transgressions. To add scorn to these degradations, he dressed his horse with more gold than I. When he tried to ride her, she threw him. Is it no wonder he provoked the relentless laughter of the gods?

KEIKO

But what of the Trojan War? They say you caused it by goading Paris with Helen.

APHRODITE

Was it not Menelaus' greed that started the war? Are not all wars born of the same symptoms of virility? Just like Hephaestus wanted gold, Menelaus wanted the gold of Helen's beauty, but, even more so, the gold of the crown that it brought to him. She had the power and wealth to make him a king. Love does not come back, Keiko-san; it moves forward. All these years of living in darkness… is it not time to paint a new portrait? You are in a land of possibility. Seek your metamorphosis. The reason you can see me again is because you left behind your old life. By this very act, you face a new canvas.

(KEIKO stares uncertainly at the goddess.)

You can be truly beautiful. You can. In ways you never dreamed of.

KEIKO

No. Now there is only one thing you can teach me about love: how to live without it.

APHRODITE

You do not sit with me in this garden to defy love. If that were true, you would have chosen the river or chosen to hide in the church basement forever. But you are here, here with me in this young and beautiful country. Is it hope you have come looking for?

(As goddess and woman gaze at one another, lights cross-fade to…)

Scene 10

Scene Ten

(A spotlight fades up on DR˙ EVERETT and KEIKO. He removes her shroud and loosens her kimono to examine her. [The audience cannot see her face.] DR˙ EVERETT tries not to react strongly to what he sees.)

KEIKO

(after flinching from the opening of her kimono)

Sorry, sensei.

EVERETT

Relax, Miss Kimura. I'm a doctor, your doctor. I'm here to help you.

(a quick pause, then:)

In the surgeries conducted by the Japanese surgeons, the best skin for grafting on the face was used. Unfortunately, technique was lacking--no disrespect intended.

(replaces the shroud)

KEIKO

Sensei, ano ne… I do not need surgery. My sister and the other girls who want this so much… they need it.

EVERETT

You do need it. If only to regain dexterity in your hands.

(a pause, then:)

Miss Kimura? What are you really afraid of? … do you fear not being beautiful?

KEIKO

When I see beautiful girl now, I think she does not know all she has. But…

EVERETT

Yes?

KEIKO

Then I feel… I feel ashamed.

EVERETT

Why?

KEIKO

Beauty should not be mourned.

EVERETT

It's a loss, too. Just think of when a museum burns and an exquisite painting is lost.

KEIKO

My sister used to say I was rare like blue moon. But we know moon is only rock with craters. Rest is myth. When man sees beautiful flower, he snaps stem, wears it like badge; it wither and dies. He does not want it anymore.

EVERETT

Are you afraid to live a normal life again?

KEIKO

I have forgotten what a normal life is.

(a pause)

Do you know that there were four Japanese cities that could have been bombed that day? America chose Hiroshima because our weather was clear that day. A brilliant blue sky.

EVERETT

Miss Kimura, please consent to the surgery. I chose you because there is great potential for success in your case. I can help you.

KEIKO

So desu ka. How will you know if you have been successful?

EVERETT

I don't know. When you can play the piano again? The other girls are so eager. You were my first choice.

(KEIKO tries to hide her surprise; he takes a photo out of his pocket)

Your sister gave me this.

KEIKO

A picture of me.

EVERETT

Yes. Something to work from.

KEIKO

(takes it, studies it; quietly)

I remember her…

(KEIKO returns the photo to DR˙ EVERETT and kowtows, embarrassing him. He kneels on the floor in front of her. She looks up and they gaze into each others' eyes with a newfound trust. He helps her rise. They rise together.)

EVERETT

I have a surprise for you. Your sister will be joining us. Come.

(Lights up on a table stacked with twenty-five small gift boxes. SHIZUKO enters and bows.)

EVERETT

I had these specially made for you girls. You don't have to be afraid to go out in public anymore.

(He hands a box to each woman. They open them. SHIZUKO removes from hers a white porcelain mask of Aphrodite's face [of Venetian style with handle on bottom]. She gasps in awe and admiration. KEIKO stares down at the contents of her box with curiosity. She does not remove her gift.)

SHIZUKO

Aphrodite. Your goddess.

KEIKO

So desu ne.

EVERETT

You admired the statue so much that it inspired me to have these made. I had identical masks made for all twenty-five young ladies in the Hiroshima Maidens project.

KEIKO

"Hiroshima maidens"?

EVERETT

That's how most of the doctors refer to you. It's purely a geographical reference and, of course, most of you are young, unmarried women; hence, the "maidens."

KEIKO

(more to herself than him:)

Demo one day maidens grow old. Then what do you call us?

EVERETT

Well, I thought you'd like these masks.

SHIZUKO

(admires hers)

Beautiful.

(to KEIKO)

Kirei ne. Daisuki desu.

(KEIKO removes hers from the box and holds it in front of her face. SHIZUKO looks at her and nods with approval.)

KEIKO

But the masks… they are all the same.

EVERETT

Yes.

KEIKO

An army of twenty-five Aphrodites, *ne.*

EVERETT

Pardon?

KEIKO

We are twenty-five individuals, yet you make us same.

EVERETT

Well, for the group. Japan is like that, isn't it? The group first, everything for the greater good?

KEIKO

After the bomb, we no longer allowed to be part of great Japanese group. We are outsiders.

EVERETT

But the Maidens are different. This is a healing group.

KEIKO

So sorry, but I cannot be a Hiroshima Maiden. First, I must be Keiko.

SHIZUKO

Dr˙ Everett, what you do for us: very kind.

EVERETT

I certainly meant no offense.

KEIKO

Today, you teach me something. Today, I know why I am here. If I may, I like to be first patient for operation.

EVERETT

This is wonderful news. Now we have more to celebrate than the masks. We can celebrate everybody's enthusiasm for the work at hand. My wife and I would like to take all twenty-five of you girls to a new Susan Hayward movie. How about that?

KEIKO

Ii desu ne. What is it called?

EVERETT

"I'll Cry Tomorrow."

(The absurdity of the title catches KEIKO off-guard. She suppresses laughter, as does her sister. The doctor smiles with embarrassment.)

EVERETT

Sorry, but I wanted it to be Susan Hayward.

KEIKO

Sounds like sad movie, *ne.*

EVERETT

Well, perhaps I ought to look for a comedy, something to lift your spirits.

KEIKO

No, no, I like sad movies. Especially Susan Hayward sad movies. Japanese like tragedy very, very much.

EVERETT

I see. All right then. "I'll Cry Tomorrow" it is. No matter how sad it is, at least we'll get to gaze at Miss Hayward's lovely face.

KEIKO

You know why she is so beautiful to me?

EVERETT

Is it the cheekbones or the eyes?

KEIKO

The art of her. The movies… that is her museum. There, the world can always see her. She is a wonderful

artist.

EVERETT

Uh yes of course. She is. She is indeed.

(The women bow to DR˙ EVERETT as lights shift, and DR˙ EVERETT and SHIZUKO exit. A magical light envelopes KEIKO. She stares at her mask as music fades in low and a surreal vanity with a glass-less mirror appears on the side of the stage. KEIKO sits at the vanity and stares at herself in the mirror. As she holds up the mask to her shrouded face, APHRODITE appears on the other side of the mirror. She, too, wears a shroud of stained, shredded gold threads. At first, KEIKO does not recognize her. KEIKO touches the mirror with the palm of her free hand. APHRODITE puts her hand against the mirror in the same place as KEIKO'S hand, nearly touching. In the background, the diaphanous image of twenty-four other women in kimonos and Aphrodite masks appears as lights slowly fade.)

Scene 11

Scene Eleven

(Lights fade in on DR˙ EVERETT'S office. SHIZUKO and KEIKO are alone. SHIZUKO paces. Both wear their Aphrodite masks.)

KEIKO

Are you sure you have to do this?

SHIZUKO

I didn't come all this way for nothing. And I hope you didn't either.

KEIKO

Some of the others girls are scared. Aiko said her mother made her come here.

SHIZUKO

And what made you come here?

KEIKO

If you're going to insist on going through with this experiment, then I'll have to do it too. And I'll go first. I'm the oldest.

SHIZUKO

I pulled the lot to go first. It's my turn.

KEIKO

This isn't a contest, Shizuko.

SHIZUKO

All my life, I've gone second or not at all. You were the one to go first, be first, be noticed first. I've worn your hand-me-down clothes. … even the boy you liked was the one I liked…

KEIKO

Look at you. Maybe you're not frightened at all.

(SHIZUKO takes her sister's hand and bows her head in brief prayer. KEIKO, mask erect, stares outward into the distance.)

SHIZUKO

Keiko? The day the bomb fell, I wished… I wished the gods would punish you.

KEIKO

I know.

SHIZUKO

I'm sorry.

KEIKO

It's all right.

SHIZUKO

Tell me something. Do you sometimes feel relieved to no longer be beautiful?

KEIKO

(surprised by the question and then:)

I hardly remember it except for what others say. And then it seems as though they're talking about someone I only vaguely knew--and a very long time ago.

SHIZUKO

She was a good person too.

(KEIKO bows to her sister emotionally. SHIZUKO bows back and then hugs her. KEIKO, uncomfortable with the embrace, smiles and bows again. DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI brings in a hospital gurney as all lights fade to black except for a glowing, heavenly light on the bed. SHIZUKO steps into the light. He puts a gleaming exaggerated hospital gown on her as she holds her mask proudly. DR˙ EVERETT enters and, for a moment, he and SHIZUKO study one another.)

SHIZUKO

Dr˙ Everett?

EVERETT

Yes?

SHIZUKO

I know… I know you do not really like us Japanese girls.

EVERETT

Nonsense. You're great girls.

SHIZUKO

But Japanese girls. I know.

EVERETT

I--I--

SHIZUKO

It is okay. Thank you for big heart. *Doomo arigato gozaimasu.*

(DR˙ EVERETT helps SHIZUKO lie down on the gurney and exits with her. KEIKO bows respectfully as her sister passes by. Then KEIKO immediately steps into the light and kneels. Her face still unseen to the audience, she holds her mask away from her and stares thoughtfully at it as lights fade.)

Scene 12

Scene Twelve

(Lights indicating alarm flash on the stage as a frantic DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI runs across and exits. Lights shift to DR˙ EVERETT standing in a stark spotlight, ablaze with heavenly light. APHRODITE appears on the upper periphery of this light, her arms extended. Her face reflects some disfigurement. She is more worn, dirtier; but possessed of desperation and grace.)

EVERETT

I swear by Apollo the physician… and I take to witness all the gods, all the goddesses, to keep according to my ability and my judgment the following Oath: I will prescribe regimen for the good of my patients… and never do harm to-

(voice breaks)

(KEIKO, shrouded and with a worn book in hand, enters the stage.)

EVERETT

To please no one will I give advice which may cause his death. …I will preserve the-

(KEIKO enters his light and inadvertently startles him. APHRODITE hovers at KEIKO'S side and urges her towards him.)

EVERETT

Keiko. Hello.

KEIKO

Hello, Dr˙ Everett. Was that prayer?

EVERETT

An oath for doctors. The Hippocratic Oath.

KEIKO

How is my sister doing? Dr˙ Everett? Are you all right?

EVERETT

Keiko… I…

KEIKO

Dr˙ Everett?

EVERETT

Keiko… your sister… she… she didn't make it.

KEIKO

Sorry?

EVERETT

Your sister… she… died on the operating table.

KEIKO

No.

EVERETT

The anesthesia. Too much and-

(She accidentally drops her mask and it shatters. As APHRODITE picks up the fragments, KEIKO fights tears.)

KEIKO

You killed my sister. Another man playing god…

EVERETT

I-I'm sorry…

(She stares at him with chilly fortitude and exits as lights cross-fade to a wash of twilight, center stage, which KEIKO enters. DR˙ EVERETT remains in the peripheries of this light. DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI wheels in SHIZUKO on the hospital gurney. Her mask rests over her face. Lights shift to a glowing light on the bed. The doctors stand in the background as KEIKO hovers over her sister. APHRODITE stands on the other side of the bed and removes SHIZUKO'S mask to reveal her face--a good face. APHRODITE uses the mask to cover her own face. Lights fade out.)

Scene 13

Scene Thirteen

(A stark spotlight fades up on a motionless KEIKO, shrouded and masked. The increasingly worn and disfigured APHRODITE enters and hovers about her. She caresses KEIKO'S hands and is startled by the force with which KEIKO suddenly pulls away, only to return to her immobile state.)

APHRODITE

I remember you.

KEIKO

Forget me.

APHRODITE

This is not the metamorphosis for which I had hoped.

KEIKO

I am so very mortal and ready to claim its ultimate cowardice. Can you help me with that?

APHRODITE

All that I have ever asked is that you honor love. Beginning with yourself.

(DR˙ EVERETT enters with tea cups and APHRODITE draws into the shadows. KEIKO grows motionless again.)

EVERETT

How are you feeling today, Keiko? I brought you some green tea. Dr˙ Matsubayashi had it sent from Tokyo. He taught me to steep it correctly. May we enjoy it together?

(KEIKO is about to snatch the tea cup from the doctor in anger, but the silhouette of the goddess turns--except it is not APHRODITE, but SHIZUKO'S spirit transformed into a divine presence as exquisite as APHRODITE before the bomb. She carries branches of oleander. She stops KEIKO in mid-movement, taking her by the hands and holding her as KEIKO begins to cry. DR˙ EVERETT is unaware of the spirit.)

EVERETT

My baby brother was killed by a Japanese in Guam. Every year at Thanksgiving, I made my mother set a place for him. I couldn't let go.

KEIKO

Get out.

EVERETT

What war brings can't be erased by your anger or mine. Guilt can't erase it either. Pieces of us are lost forever, but can't we try to bring some balance into the universe with what's left of us? I ask not only for the chance, but for the honor of finishing the journey of forgiveness with you. Isn't it what your sister would have wanted?

(As SHIZUKO'S spirit kneels at KEIKO'S feet and lays her head on her lap and KEIKO caresses her hair, KEIKO finally looks up at DR˙ EVERETT. Again, he offers her the tea cup. It glistens. Lights cross-fade to…)

Scene 14

Scene Fourteen

(Immediately spotlight fades in down stage on the surreal vanity. KEIKO enters, her face and hands wrapped in surreal glittering bandages. She sits at the vanity, facing up stage. APHRODITE appears fully disfigured with bandages on her head and hands and begins to remove KEIKO'S bandages. KEIKO fights her fear at what she might see. The bandages fall to the floor. KEIKO observes her new countenance. APHRODITE kisses her on the forehead. KEIKO looks at APHRODITE with sadness, and touches her scars and caresses her hands. DR˙ EVERETT and DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI enter; and APHRODITE immediately strikes a pose as a statue. The men are not aware of her presence. DR˙ EVERETT carries an urn meticulously wrapped in white silk and bound with velvet cord. DR˙ MATSUBAYASHI then looks at DR˙ EVERETT and nods. DR˙ EVERETT hands KEIKO the urn. She takes it slowly.)

KEIKO

My sister.

MATSUBAYASHI

(as he bows)

In her honorable shadow…

KEIKO

(bows to the urn)

Sa. Owarimashita. Tsukare sama deshita.

EVERETT

Keiko, your suffering isn't over yet. There will be other surgeries. Dr˙ Matsubayashi should be able to carry those out in Japan.

(She bows to DR˙ EVERETT. He bows back. Then he offers his hand to shake. She shakes it. APHRODITE nods and exits.)

EVERETT

There are also issues concerning the grafted skin. It will age differently.

MATSUBAYASHI

The thigh skin we had to use on your face has fatty tissue. It may grow puffy and stand out. [...]Missing page no. 52[...] beautiful.

(The goddess form of SHIZUKO joins APHRODITE. Ethereal images of goddesses from around the world, antiquity to present, emerge and blend in the background.)

APHRODITE & SHIZUKO

You are like me now. Immortal. As immortal as all myth.

(The goddesses exits and the magic light tightens on KEIKO. She looks outward.)

KEIKO

You must tell the story. Of your hard times. And laugh twice.

(a pause, then:)

Be. Not. Afraid.

(Black-out. End of play.)